

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Luke 1:26-38



Suggested Prayer: *As we seek to have a “Mustard Seed Faith” that produces great fruit, pray that we recognize our personal need for purpose, not for importance.*

This Study’s Goal: This study takes a look at a well-known story from a different angle. Instead of focusing on the miracle of Jesus’ birth, we focus on the role of Mary. Mary’s disposition, “may it be as you have said,” seems to be at the heart of God’s choice to use her. Her willingness to submit and to empty herself of her rights to her own body yielded the greatest miracle in human history. Seek to find what God is saying to you as an individual and to your group. The God who creates life and defies nature can bless your world through

your willing spirit.

Leader: If this is being used by a group, there are some instructions for the study leader italicized and/or in parentheses. These instructions should help facilitate the flow of the study.

Planting

(Leader may read this as an introduction)

Have you ever felt undeserving of God’s great purpose? Maybe you thought well of those important folks who are called to serve God. You know who I mean – the Bible characters, the church fathers and mothers, the missionaries, the preachers. Well, maybe not the preachers, since we hear them every week and we KNOW that they are not so special. Even more deserving of the calling are those who have been called to be missionaries to Africa. Many have perceived them as spiritual giants. Of course, these are tongue-in-cheek statements. But you may have said to yourself, “Me...what could God do with me?” Many times those feelings of inadequacy lead us to trying to make sure people recognize our importance.

Perhaps you have never even thought about that. You have practiced your faith, gone to church, prayed, and periodically read the scriptures, but you never even considered how God would use you for His greater plan. Do you think your life can change the history of humankind? Some of us think that a few scriptures compile the life histories of countless people whose small actions can be traced to God and whose attitude of surrender impelled great change for others. But sometimes our ordinary lives feel less than worthy of God’s purposes. This fear of how we see ourselves and how others see us, keeps us from being truly useful.

The idea that Jesus, who was sent to live and die for the sins of the world, had to begin His spiritual growth somewhere makes me really curious about Mary, His mother on earth. A lot is left to the imagination. Couldn’t you just imagine Mary thinking about what kinds of perks would come with being the one who carried and birthed the savior of this world? Surely there were some benefits gained by the lofty status. We all want to be perceived as valuable. What kinds of secondary gains could Mary have had?

“I just wish you would tell me your secret. Your child is perfect!” Wouldn’t you want at least a little bit of the credit? We all have seen our children as an extension of ourselves. If they did

great, we were filled with pride. If they messed up, we would want to hide under a rock. Surely we have seen their successes as marks of our success.

Can you imagine how convenient it would be to sit in the circle of soccer moms and share your child's recent accomplishments if you were Mary? "Oh yes, J.C. is a self-directed learner, in fact by age 12, he was a universal expert in his field." How hard would it be for everyone else to deal with it? For example, a fight breaks out between two of the players, Alan and Paul. The young boys are bruised and dirty, and all of the spectators are now concerned. Mary, who is an observer turns to her son and says, "Ok, J.C., who started it?" "Well," says J.C. "Alan may have been the one to whisper the first ugly word today, but the thoughts of envy and jealousy that Paul has had for Alan's soccer abilities for the past years, fostered by his parents' critical comments after every game, are really responsible for today's blow up." I wouldn't imagine that Mary and her "obnoxious" J.C., would have been invited to many of the birthday parties.

Tending

(Leader may read this paragraph or request that a volunteer read it)

The above "what ifs" only seems plausible when we base it on our ways of handling "God's mighty purposes." Not Mary. Mary sought no glory in her mission. It was not about her. We don't know much about Mary. We have multiple writings by the apostle Paul and references to him in many other biblical books. But Mary never wrote anything. She is not even mentioned in the book of Hebrews hall of faith. All we hear are the gospel stories about her Magnificat (her song of exaltation), her immaculate conception, her virgin birth, the trip to the temple, and the wedding supper to name a few. Even then, some of the roles she played is described in less detail than Joseph's role.

Throughout church history there were those who felt Mary had not been given enough attention. Many false theologies, including some of today's modernist version of Mariology, have stemmed from the lack of information about Mary. She is someone whose life changed the course of history more than any one person, apart from Christ. She bore the son of God. She raised and taught the son of God – Mary, the mother of God, in the flesh. Yet, we don't know too much about her. We do, however, know about God through her. Learning about Mary's immediate response when called to serve God in His mission, can also help us develop that disposition. This type of submissiveness will remove our self-doubt and our pride, and free us to be His magnificent vessels.

A few pointers about leading this next section of the study:

- ✦ *The following inductive questions should be asked, giving enough time for participants to look up the verses.*
- ✦ *Leaders should not fear silence, and preferably should not answer the questions.*
- ✦ *If the participants' answers are close to the text, use them; if not, ask someone to read the verse again.*
- ✦ *Don't correct the participants' responses. Instead, you may say "Well, let's read the question again," or "Could someone read the verse again?"*
- ✦ *Please don't simply read the questions and answers, as this takes away from the discovery of God's message to each person. The questions are there to build reaction and interaction.*
- ✦ *After the participants' responses you may share the answers as you have studied them, and as suggested.*

1) How does this passage first introduce Mary? (v. 26)

This passage introduces Mary as a virgin pledged to Joseph. I have heard many explanations about her purity and holiness. However, I don't see the Scriptures telling us much about that. Being a virgin may unfortunately be an unusual status in our society, but it was customary at that time (as it is in godly homes) to wait until you were married to be with a man. So, that characteristic alone couldn't have qualified her. Highlighting her virginity is simply a way of emphasizing the divine paternity. Her genealogy highlights the earthly line to David.

2) How does Mary's first response to the angel seem to indicate that something unusual was happening? How do we know? (v. 27)

The narrative in this passage is not ordinary by any means. Angel Gabriel comes onto the stage. Note that this appears to be an unusual experience for Mary because she was greatly troubled, or fearful, wondering what kind of message would warrant an angel. She was greatly troubled, not knowing what the angel's appearing meant.

3) Why did God pick her? (v. 28)

The angel told her she was favored because of what the Lord would do through her, not because of what she had or had not done. We really are not told much about Mary's gifts, talents, and abilities, nor are we told about the fringe benefits of having Jesus as her child. She was simply who God chose to use. Her response to the news, however, indicates a heart response that God wants from all godly women.

4) What was Mary's question regarding the foretold plan? (v. 34) Based on her question, do you believe she doubted the prophecy? Please discuss

"How can this be? I am a virgin and cannot be pregnant." Young as she may have been (many guesstimates based on the tradition of the times indicate she could have been 13 or so) she knew the facts of life. Being pregnant required a "seed" and she knew she had not been with any man. Nature seemed to point to impossibility. She did not seem to be questioning the answer. She simply desired some information. Understanding the process and what to expect seems to be a natural need when you feel vulnerable. Instead of doubt, she was asking for some explanation about God's miracle.

5) What was the angel's explanation of what would take place? Reading the passage (v. 35-37), consider the experience she was to expect.

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God....For nothing is impossible with God."

This verse is non-sexual, yet it describes how God would circumvent nature and incarnate this world. It is a very personal verse. Have you ever heard a sermon on this passage? Probably not. Why do you think we don't hear much from the pulpit about this verse? The Trinity is present in the immaculate conception. God's inconceivable plan requires using Mary in the most sacred of all ways. This passage is the most intimate description of God in three persons, coming to life in us and through us. To let her know that this miracle could really take place, the angel told her

about her cousin having a child in old age.

6) What was her final response to the angel's message?

"I am the Lord's servant, may it be as you have said." It can be frightening to consider God's level of control, yet Mary chose to submit to God. She submitted without questions asked about her inadequacies or about what she could contribute to the equation.

Harvesting

(This section may be read or the leader may share their conclusions)

God's work is being done, His purposes are being fulfilled, and we can be instruments in His mighty and powerful hands. When Mary visited Elizabeth, her cousin recognized and expressed Mary's high calling. However, in Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55), she exalted God alone, and not her mission. This awareness of God requires a certain type of character and a certain disposition that many lack. It doesn't take great big faith, just a big God. Look at what Mary had to say:

My place as a worshiper: *"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant."*

My purpose as a vessel: *"From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is His name."*

God's works: *"His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation (Mercy). He has performed mighty deeds with His arm (Might); He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts (Discernment). He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble (Sovereignty). He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty (Provision). He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as He said to our fathers (Faithfulness)."*

Celebrating the Bounty

Reflection Questions: Questions to think about. You may ask for volunteers to answer aloud.

1. How do you express the depth of your love for God? What would you sing about God, if you were a songwriter? What would your journal notes say about God?
2. Have you had a time when you felt intimacy with God, when you surrender to Him and His will in your life?
3. How has God wanted to use you? Have you been resistant?

Suggested closing prayer *(Join hands and commit as a group to surrender)*

Lord, may it be to us as you would have it. Amen.

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